

CONCERNING ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S ANCESTRY.

A VERY INTERESTING ARTICLE BY THE LATE HONORABLE ANDREW PRICE, PUBLISHED A FEW YEARS AGO, IN THE POCAHONTAS TIMES.

This paper is undertaken to discuss with you the identity of Lincoln's maternal grandfather. Under ordinary circumstances this might be considered a delicate question, but so much harm has been done by the number of books that have been published on the subject and the scandal that has covered the nation that I am sure that I cannot add to the sorrow of two good women. It is my sincere desire to place them in a better light before a hundred million people, everyone of whom is deeply indebted to them for the savior of the nation, Abraham Lincoln. The women I refer to are Lucy Hanks and her daughter Nancy Hanks.

Each passing year adds new luster to the name of Abraham Lincoln. Devoted as I have been to the neglected history of West Virginia, so long at the mercy of the mercenaries among historians, I had not considered Lincoln as a study demanding my attention any further than his actions as a statesman were responsible for the formation of the State of West Virginia, and the movements of the Civil War within this State.

Every drop of blood in me is Confederate. I was born since the war but I can remember the days when Lincoln was not revered universally either in the North or in the South. When it is remembered that his Gettysburg speech, now considered the supreme voicing of thought, was ridiculed and derided by Northern editors, some idea can be obtained of what Lincoln had to endure in his lifetime before the second sober thought of his countrymen set him on the highest place in history ever known in the troubled story of the world.

The Lincolns belonged to Rockingham County, Virginia.

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That was the County filled with what we call pacifists in this day. It was the breed of Quakers, Mennonites and Dunkards. High class, level headed people who had a clear understanding of the horrors of war where the winner is also a ^{loser} ~~loser~~. And as for the almighty dollar, they were experts in that game, and money was highly important to them. That was the country that suffered more than any other county in the United States per capita, and while Lincoln was president and commander in chief of the army. My earliest impressions then were from men who had suffered from the burning and raiding of the Valley of Virginia and "Old Abe" was about the best name that they called him. If it had not been for my father, who was a historian and a Confederate soldier and who appreciated the greatness of Lincoln long before some of the men of disappointing ambitions in the North I might have grown up in the belief that the war president had cloven hoofs.

Later on when we had moved from Rockingham county to the mountains of West Virginia, and I had the opportunity of hearing men discuss for endless hours in conversation the history of the Civil War, I began to see how the existence of the Union depended upon the unfaltering purpose of one man, just as the success of the Revolution was due to the steadfast nature and good judgment of George Washington. I have come to regard Abraham Lincoln as one of the men that the Lord provides from time to time to preserve mankind from destruction through their own mad passions and prejudices.

Perhaps the most engrossing problem ever presented to the psychologist was how Lincoln the wise man and the man without the ~~benefit~~ benefit of even a most primitive school, could have been evolved from the Lincolns and the Hankses., as the sole representative of two

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prolific families that ever showed any scholastic ability or who ever reached an eminent position upon his own merit. If there ever was a case of a man who burst his birth's invidious bar, it was he.

Ever since I can remember the searchers after truth who delighted in unsavory subjects were divided in two schools, one which advanced the ~~many~~ theory that Lincoln was the son of John C. Calhoun, and the other that Lincoln was the half brother of Jefferson Davis. Something like forty years ago I was able to combat both theories for I had found out that if there ever was a pure and virtuous woman on the face of the earth it was Nancy Hanks Lincoln, the mother of Abraham Lincoln. Therefore there could not be any truth in those rumors. Never was there a more undeserved case of the fell work of the livid wing of scandal.

But when it comes to the question of Lucy Hanks, the grandmother ~~of~~ who atoned for what some might consider a mistake of her girlhood by a long life of good works as a noble Christian woman the wife of a good man, and the mother of nine children, we have to accept the fact that Nancy Hanks was a base born child and we have to look to the circumstances surrounding that fact.

There can be little doubt that the Hanks family knew who was the father of Nancy Hanks and there can be no doubt that they regarded it as a secret so profound that it could not be divulged. I believe that Abraham Lincoln knew who his grandfather was and that his lips were tightly sealed. All that he said about it, that has been preserved was that his grandfather was a Virginia planter and that he believed that whatever talent

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that he had was inherited from his unnamed grandfather. This is one of the strongest evidences to me that the gentleman that I am about to name was the grandfather of Abraham Lincoln.

One of Lincoln's great aunts, a sister of Lucy, had a child before marriage by a man by the name of Charles Friend. It did not suit to marry for some reason or other but there was no great concealment for they named the baby Dennis Friend Hanks and he was adopted along with little Nancy by Elizabeth Sparrow, aunt to both of them, and brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This was the Dennis Hanks, a sort of fireside philosopher who was an earlier counselor of his cousin Abe. This Dennis Hanks took the view that he should perjure himself like a gentleman and prove that Nancy Hanks was named Nancy Sparrow and born in lawful wedlock after Lucy married the other Sparrow. This he failed to accomplish. I suppose that these matters had best not be discussed as a general thing, but when the fate of nations depend upon the ~~xxxxx~~ vagaries of human beings there is nothing much we can do but reaffirm our faith and dependence in Providence, and admit that we are helpless and dependent mortals.

A woman said the other day that what was the rightest thing in the world could be the wrongest thing in the world under different circumstances.

Physically Lincoln took after the Lincolns. They were given to ungainly forms. One of my earliest recollections was one of the clan that was six feet, seven inches tall and thin and raw boned.

Lincoln was a counsins of R. E. Lee, The name of Lee is one of the proudest in Virginia and China. Some of the rest of us decayed aristocrats may whisper around that the Lees are a comparatively modern family, dating back to a mere two hundred years or so, but the Lees sail grandly on nevertheless and number many great and important names on the list. They ought to agree on the spelling however for away back there a distinguished Virginia jurist, spelled his name Leigh. It looks like there may have been an ancestor phonetically inclined, like the branch that were apt to spell their name Linkhorn.

Dr. Barton of Foxboro, Massachusetts, has become the most famous of the biographers of Lincoln, though Emil Ludwig is making a pass at the subject at this time and he seems to be a man of parts, capable of felicity in expression and discernment. West Virginia at this great intellectual feast takes the place of the poor man at a frolic. We ~~fixt~~ furnished a tottering democracy with the immortal Nancy and you cannot laugh that off. I have had many kind letters from Dr. Barton lately and he has accepted my help in the spirit in which it was offered. After the home of the Hanks had been found to be in Mineral County I was able to locate the missing title papers. In that I functioned as an attorney-at-law, rather than a historian. It is a matter of considerable satisfaction to me that the title and survey have passed the critical inspection of David C. Martin. I noticed in Dr. Barton's late book that he has the picture of the ruins of a house with a cellar as one of the possible sites of the Hanks homestead. This is to an antiquarian is an anachronism, as the pioneers on the headwaters did not have cellars in 1784.

I feel that the best evidence of the identity of the mysterious grandfather is to be gathered from Lincoln's talk with his law partner, William H. Herndon, who has recorded it in his history, and his account should be carefully considered. Herndon said:-

"It was about 1850 when he and I were driving in his one horse buggy to the court in Menard County, ~~Illinois~~. He spoke, for the first time in my hearing, of his mother, dwelling on her characteristics and mentioning or enumerating what qualities he inherited from her. He said among other things, that she was the illegitimate daughter of Lucy Hanks and a well bred Virginia farmer or planter, and he argued that from this last source came his power of analysis, his mental activity, his ambition, and all the qualities that distinguished him from the other members and descendants of the Hanks family. The revelation, painful as it was, called up the recollection of his mother, and as the buggy jolted over the road, he added ruefully, "God, bless my Mother; all that I am or ever hope to be I owe to her."

In the Virginias the word planter is never used to describe a farmer in the Valley or in the Mountains. It is confined to the tobacco and cotton regions, and that is what was meant in this case. It is apparent that Lincoln knew who the grandfather was and that there was a powerful reason for not disclosing the name. It would have been fatal to his political life. It would have invoked a storm of ridicule. Lincoln up to the hour of his death was subjected to abuse and ~~much~~ adverse criticism. Kind words were few and far between.

Joseph Hanks was a native of Richmond county a county in the Northern Neck where it narrows down to the few miles that separate the tidal rivers, the Potomac and the Rappahannock. The space here is taken up largely by Richmond County and Westmoreland County, and this spot has been the birthplace of many prominent men among them being Washington, Monroe, the Lees and other prominent personages.

Hanks signed by mark. He married Ann Lee. He was in the Fairfax grant and decided to go to the extreme western part of the Fairfax lands. This was about 1782, as fixed by Barton, from certain records that he examined in Richmond county. The way at that time lay by Alexandria by Leesburg, through Snickers Gap of the Blue Ridge, and by Winchester and Romney to Patterson Creek.

Fairfax had set aside as manor lands 9000 acres of the bottoms along Patterson Creek but there was good land to be taken up outside the reservation.

When he moved he had nine children, five boys and four girls and all must have been with him as they were listed in the census of 1782 as living in Hampshire County.

Reaching back towards the Allegheny Front was Mikes Run a stream about ten miles long. In this neighborhood, Hanks saw George Terry who had settled there. He looked at a choice spot in a hollow in the hills on the head drains of Mikes Run which Peter Hartman had bought of Fairfax in 1781. Hartman had gone back to Washington County, Maryland, beyond the danger of Indian raids and had left George Terry a title bond for the tract.

It was 216 acres and just filled the little hollow. It had lime stones to insure its fertility. There were sugar trees. Good springs, shelter from the storms. Protection from the Indians. It had even a good deer lick. Terry agreed with Hanks that the latter should have the northern end. The tract was something over a mile broad and lay parallel with the mountain ranges. Hanks built his home here. Barton says that Hanks may have come in the latter part of the year 1782. That is not at all probable. Whoever heard of a settler like Hanks who had no money coming to the mountains in the fall of the year. It would be as unnatural as for geese to fly north at that time. It was ~~absolutely~~ absolutely necessary to raise enough corn to see the family through the winter. And when it is proven that Hanks wintered there with nine children, we know full well that he raised a patch of corn by hand the summer of 1782.

He must have been there two years. From the spring of 1783 to the spring of 1784. He had improved the land by clearing and building a house of one room which had no floor, no window and not much a chimney.

Hanks was a good citizen and a typical pioneer no doubt. There was a strong religious streak in the breed. I like to quote that verse about the pioneer families and how they trained their youths: "He raised them rough, but he raised them well, when their feet took hold of the paths of hell, he filled them full of the wrath of God and tanned their hides with an old ramrod."

To this household came trouble and disaster. Their

fine daughter, Lucy, unmarried, was found to be pregnant. That put the household on the move. Hanks was poor. He managed to raise about a hundred dollars from a money lender by giving a lien on his land. It does not state that this was gold. Anything but that. And considering the state of the national and state currency it must have been a pitiful sum. Hardly enough to flag a bread wagon in this day and time. But on it the family turned their faces to the setting sun and their place knew them no more.

It was only by real work that Barton was able to locate them from year to year from the Atlantic coast to the western part of Kentucky. And there is an hiatus in his record from 1784 to 1787. It would be well for search to be made in the records of Monongalia and Ohio counties, West Virginia, and the original counties of the Virginia part of Pennsylvania, for it is more than likely that the Hanks raised corn for a season or two on the waters of the ~~Monongahela~~ Monongahela. The year 1784 was a specifically dangerous year for immigrants to float down the Ohio, and I hardly think it possible that they got through the Indian lines that year.

Hanks died in Kentucky nine years after leaving Miles Run a rich and substantial farmer. He mentions every child he has in the will and leaves each something, except no mention is made of his daughter, Lucy. Conjecture is that Lucy has been well provided for in worldly goods. Conjecture is that Hanks has prospered exceedingly in the lean years between 1784 and 1793. What is the explanation? The Virginia planter.

In Kentucky Hanks Lucy has a few more troubled years,

but by 1790 she has agreed to marry Henry Sparrow and she writes a letter to the clerk saying that she is of age and for him to issue a Lisons for her and Henry Sparrow. Lucy had one error marked against her in a way on November 24, 1790, when a grand-jury of hes returned an indictment against her for fornication. Scribes and Pharisees! Henry Sparrow comes into court and executes a marriage bond that he will marry Lucy and the fornication case is thrown out of court. Lincoln's mother died when he was a small boy but his grandmother, Lucy lived until Lincoln was a man grown, and Lincoln was a serious, deep, and discerning man. Does anyone believe that he did not know who his grandfather was?

The clue we have is that Lucy Hanks was betrayed in the year 1783, in Hampshire county. The question naturally arises from the known facts whether there was any Virginia planter turning loose in that county during the summer of 1783? It appears th t there was. That he was rich, and powerful, of an amazing personal perfection, in the dangerous fifties, devoted to hunting and to woods life, and who had been borned and raised with Joseph Hanks. Hanks being about seven years older than the planter. History places this planter in that Eastern Panhandle the summer of 1783. In fact he had a summer home there. That particular year he was the employer of and the financial Baker of a man who was trying to build a boat that would float upstream without sails or oars.

That is the fatal opportunity. The summer of the next year we can imagine that some planter coming back to his summer home and finding a deserted cabin in the woods and the Hanks

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family in exile. The neighbors tell him perhaps that Lucy had been ruined and the family to hide their shame have gone to Kentucky. Then the planter gets up an expedition to Kentucky under the plea of looking after his real estate holdings on the Ohio River. History ~~tells~~ says that after getting to the navigable waters of the Ohio he finds the Indians are up and that it would not be safe to descent the river in a boat. He spends some weeks around the headwaters of the Monongahela River and returns. One night he sits under a tree all night in the rain.

The Joseph Hanks family in its migration traveled from the coast to near the Mississippi River. They went from the banks of the Rappahannock to the headwaters of the Potomac and from there to Rough Creek or Rough River as it is now called a branch of the Green River in Kentucky. The planter had lands in each of the regions. It is significant that the only land that he owned in Kentucky was in the pennyroyal on Rough Creek where he had seven thousand acres.

Breed is stronger than pasture. No proof has been adduced that would be accepted after a plea in bar. But still it seems to me that we know the man. We sense it as it were. Perhaps I had better not be more definite concerning a man who was first in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen.

God moves in a mysterious way and the people of the United States should never cease to be grateful for George Washington, Nancy Hanks, and Abraham Lincoln, and the time will come when Nancy Hanks will rank in fame with Miriam and Joab of Arc.